

09/24/92 (pg.21)

Shortgrass Country

by Monte Noelke

One of the Shortgrass Country's prominent bakers said over the wire, "Lambs are cheaper to buy on the present market than they are to produce." His motive, I think, was to warn ahead of time his jug wasn't planning on carrying yearling ewe debentures from this fall until the paper and the ewes were suffering from old age.

Another angle (all jugkeepers are hard to pin down) is that the advice was a tip to winter dry sheep and buy a lamb crop after weaning time next spring, or ship the ewe herd to Mexico now and loan the bank the money on the CD market of some 2.8%.

One ton of solidmouth ewes is worth about \$600 delivered in San Angelo. The spot market on shelled corn, a popular feed for woolies, opened the season at \$113 per bulk ton last week. Sheep drenches ran 25 cents to six bits a dose all summer long. Shearing and sacking wool costs \$2 a head, plus hidden, unadmitted expenses. Other odds and ends, like predator control from a \$150 an hour helicopter, factor in at a neat figure of about half of the shearing expense, not counting the fatalities from whatever beast is around to kill or wound the sheep.

In January, \$800 a ton, 10 months in the wool bred ewes were wintering on 8-cents a pound range cubes and fancy enzymes molasses at the regal figure of \$43 a tub.

The puzzle is where the banker wants to come in on the deal and start keeping score. He wasn't complaining last winter when 125-pound ewes were selling pretty close to what a tub of molasses of the same weight was bringing.

Herders didn't start crying about how buying a field of sugar cane was going to be cheaper than backing up to a feed store dock. We know a good thing. Mark my words, the first time there's a cold winter, people are going to be eating hot lamb stew by the bucket full and running over each other to buy wool sweaters and scratchy long handle underwear.

However, bankers, who have kept their jugs afloat for the duration of the recession are to be respected. Mine has all my figures but hasn't called back. I wonder what he'd say if he was asked to finance a farm and a molasses mill. First guess is something along the line of the sheep quandary.